

Man Is Master of His Own Destiny

By MAURICE MAFTERLINCK.

It might almost be said that there happens to man only that they desire. It is true that on certain external events our influence is of the feeblest, but we have all-powerful action on that which these events shall become in ourselves—in other words, on their spiritual part, on what is radiant, undying within them.

There are thousands of men within whom this spiritual part, that is craving for birth in every misfortune, or love, or chance meeting, has known not one moment of life—these men pass away like a straw on the stream. And others there are within whom this immortal part absorbs all, these are like islands that have sprung up in the ocean; for they have found immovable anchorage, whence they issue commands that their destiny must needs obey. The life of most men will be saddened or lightened by the things that may chance to befall them. When you love, it is not your love that forms part of your destiny, but the knowledge of self that you will have found deep down in your love—this it is that will help to fashion your life.

If you have been deceived, it is not the deception that matters, but the forgiveness whereto it gave birth in your soul, and the loftiness, wisdom, completeness of this forgiveness—by these shall your life be steered to destiny, or to brightness and peace; by these shall your eyes see more than by those that have been faithful. If all men had even been faithful, but if by this act of deceit, there have come not more simplicity, loftier faith, wider range to your love, then have you been deceived in vain, and your life shall be a failure.

Always remember that nothing befalls us that is not of the nature of ourselves. There comes no adventure but wears to our soul the shape of our everyday thoughts, and deeds of heroism are but offered to those who, for many long years have been heroes in obscurity and silence. And whether you climb up the mountain or go down the hill to the valley, whether you journey to the end of the world or merely walk round your house, none but yourself shall you meet on the highway of fate. If Judas goes forth to-night, it is toward Judas his steps will tend, nor will chance for betrayal be lacking; but let Socrates open his door, he shall find Socrates asleep on the threshold before him, and there will be occasion for wisdom.

Our adventures hover around us like bees round the hive when preparing to swarm. They wait till the mother idea has at last come forth from our soul, and no sooner has she appeared than they all come rushing toward her.

Be false, and falsehoods will hasten to you; love, and adventures will flock to you, thrilling with love. They seem to be all on the watch for the signal we hoist from within; and if the soul grow wiser toward evening, the sorrow will grow wiser, too, that will be fashioned for itself in the morning.

No great inner event befalls those who summon it not, and yet is there germ of great inner event in the smallest occurrence of life. But events such as these are apportioned by justice, and to each man is given of his spoil in accord with his merits. We become that which we discover in the sorrows and joys that befall us, and the least expected caprices of fate soon mould themselves on our thoughts.

It is our past that destiny finds all that weapons, her vestments, her jewels. Were the only son of Therites and Socrates to die the same day, Socrates' grief would in no way resemble the grief of Therites. Misfortune or happiness, it seems, must be chastened ere it knock at the door of the sage; but only by stooping low can it enter the commonplace soul.

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